

**Computer File**

Lawrence J. Magid

# Macintosh Shapes Up a Winner

I rarely get excited over a new computer, but Apple Computer Inc.'s Macintosh, officially introduced last Tuesday, has started a fever in Silicon Valley that's hard not to catch. My symptoms started when I talked with some devotees from Apple and the various companies that produce software, hardware and literature to enhance the new computer. By the time I got my hands on the little computer and its omnipresent mouse, I was hooked. Apple has a winner.

The Mac, which retails for \$2,495, is about 14 inches tall and takes up about the same amount of desk space as

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a piece of 8½-by-11-inch paper. It is smaller and lighter than most of the so-called portable machines. The entire system can be slipped into an optional (\$99) padded carrying case to be hoisted over your shoulder or placed under an airline seat. Together they weigh 22 pounds.

Of course, any computer's real value is based on what you can do with it. For the first 100 days, Apple is including two valuable programs, MacPaint and MacWrite, free with the machine.

MacWrite has most basic word-processing features with one outstanding addition. It can vary the size and style of your type on the screen and on paper, when used with Apple's new \$495 Image Writer printer.

This computer/printer/software combination produces the first truly "what you see is what you get" word-processing system on a moderately priced micro-computer. You can vary the type size of headlines from 9 point (about the size used in most newspapers) to 72 point. You can also change type style, selecting an Old English font or one of the more common ones. Your type can be underlined or in bold, italic or even shadow print.

**Write and Illustrate Reports**

MacPaint is to graphic images what MacWrite is to words. I'm no Picasso, but I found myself drawing some rather pleasing images, using the mouse as a paintbrush to draw pictures on the screen. You can paint with different size strokes ("brushes"), in patterns or using predesigned shapes. It's easy to custom design a letterhead, a map to your house or even a self-portrait. The images you create in MacPaint can be integrated into documents produced on MacWrite, so you can create your own illustrated reports.

Until 1981, Apple, with some competition from Radio Shack, dominated the personal computer industry with its Apple II, the current version of which is still very popular. Apple started to lose market share in 1981, when IBM introduced the first popular 16-bit computer. The IBM PC soon became an industry standard. Meanwhile, the Apple III was an unqualified dud, and sales of Apple's 32-bit Lisa were disappointing. Some analysts thought that Apple was a dying company.

Apple's young chairman, Steven P. Jobs, blames his company's relatively poor performance on efforts to compete with IBM on its own terms rather than "getting back to our roots." With former PepsiCo President John Sculley at the helm, Apple is now focusing its marketing efforts on small businesses, home users and colleges.

The Macintosh is as innovative today as the Apple II was in 1977. It's one of the few computers introduced in

the last 18 months that makes no attempt to imitate the IBM PC.

It does, however, draw on Apple's experience with the larger and more expensive Lisa. Like the Lisa, it uses a hand-held "mouse"—a small pointing device that enables the user to select programs and move data from one part of the screen to another. Also like the Lisa, Macintosh uses a black and white display screen with such high resolution that it can quickly draw detailed pictures while displaying crisp, readable text.

Apple did more than scale down the Lisa. To the contrary, the Macintosh team came up with so many innovations that Apple decided to redesign the Lisa so that it, too, can run Macintosh software. Apple has also introduced three new higher-performance Lisa computers with prices starting at \$3,495. The Lisa sold for about \$10,000 when it was made available last spring.

**It's Easy to Learn**

The main advantage of the Macintosh is that it's very easy to learn and use. Apple claims that novices can learn to use the Mac in as little as 30 minutes. The company is banking on the machine's simplicity and modest price to attract millions of users.

The system comes in three pieces. The main unit houses the 9-inch screen, a built-in disk drive and all the machine's circuits and connectors. The separate keyboard is attached to the unit via what looks like a modular telephone cord. The mouse, too, has its own cord and connector.

The system is driven by a 32-bit MC 68000 central processing unit. It comes with 128K of random access memory, or RAM; 64K of read only memory, or ROM, and one 400K disk drive. The 32-bit CPU and the extensive ROM are largely responsible for its impressive graphics capability. The machine will eventually be upgradable to 512K once the new breed of 256K RAM chips becomes commercially available. An optional second (external) disk drive is \$495.

Instead of using the 5¼-inch floppy disks that the Apple II helped standardize, the Mac uses 3½-inch mini-floppies. These disks come with a built-in protective cover, can fit in a shirt pocket and are far less vulnerable to damage than standard floppies. Apple will also be using the 3½-inch disks on its new Lisa series.

Once you've set up your machine, you insert the main system disk, turn on the power, and in a minute you are presented with the introductory screen. Apple calls it your "desk top."

What you see on your screen looks a lot like what you might find on a desk. Instead of just a blinking cursor, you see pictures, called icons, that represent the things you can do with the computer. One of them is a picture of a hand, writing on a piece of paper. That represents the MacWrite word-processing program. Another shows a hand drawing on paper to represent the MacPaint graphics program.

To select a program, you move the mouse to the icon and press the button on top of the little rodent. If there are any additional options, they are displayed at the top of the screen, so you can move the mouse to make the appropriate selection. When this process was described to me, it sounded cumbersome, especially since I'm already comfortable with using a keyboard. But the mouse is so much more intuitive. As infants we learned to move objects around our playpens. Using a mouse is

an extension of that skill.

All commands are presented and issued in the same manner. Apple has gone to great lengths to ensure that all its software uses the same interface. What's more, it is using its extensive influence to assure that independent software vendors follow the lead. The intelligence that operates the mouse and creates the icons is built into the machine's ROM—making it relatively easy for software manufacturers to adhere to Apple's standards.

The value of a standard user interface can't be overstated. I run dozens of programs on my computer, and each software company has its own idea of how to move the cursor, erase data and save files. Even an experienced user must take frequent peeks at the programs' help menus and reference cards. If Apple gets its way, every program you buy will use the same basic set of commands.

Microsoft Corp. of Bellevue, Wash., has announced Mac versions of its popular Multiplan spreadsheet

program, BASIC language and Microsoft Word—an innovative new word-processing package. Lotus Development Corp. of Cambridge, Mass., also has a forthcoming Mac version of its best-selling 1-2-3 integrated spreadsheet, and Software Publishing Co. of Mountain View, Calif., will release its PFS series of data base management tools.

Available software is critical to the success of any new computer system, and Apple is counting on broad support, since the machine can't run software written for MS-DOS or any other standard operating system. The machine's inability to run MS-DOS could be its salvation or its downfall.

Whether Apple can take a byte out of IBM's sales remains to be seen. But the new Macintosh has gotten off to a delicious start.

The Computer File welcomes readers' comments but regrets that the authors cannot respond individually to letters. Write to Lawrence J. Magid, 4 Embarcadero Center, Suite 1970, San Francisco, Calif. 94111.